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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

18 June 1953

SUBJECT: DRAFT SF-46: ESTIMATE ON WHETHER TIME IS ON
OUR SIDE

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the probable relative development of the
Soviet Bloc and Western Power positions over the next 10-15
years, with a view to estimating whether or not time is on
our side.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. No general war.
2. Continuation of present programs and policies of

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both the Bloc and the Western Powers.^{1/}

DISCUSSION

1. We believe it essential to state at the outset that we cannot give any firm, unequivocal answer to the question of "whether time is on our side". Even assuming a "continuation by both sides of present policies and programs" (itself a very nebulous assumption), there are so many imponderables and contingencies which would materially affect the world situation as to prevent any firm estimate of the relative Soviet Bloc and Western Power positions, say 10-15 years from now. As stated in SE-35 (par. 14) "it is impossible to estimate whether either side will acquire a clear preponderance of power during the next decade". Nevertheless, it is possible to appraise in meaningful

^{1/} We take the assumption "continuation by both sides of present plans and policies" to mean a continuation of the generally hostile policies pursued up to this point by both great power groupings in the "cold war". However, a new uncertainty is introduced into this assumption by the "soft" tactics which are currently being pursued by the post-Stalin Kremlin regime. Unless these tactics are extremely limited and temporary in their application, they will almost certainly create a new type of cold war situation, with incalculable effects. This new Soviet policy may be only a new type of cold war offensive and the cold war will thus continue, but the West as well may have to make various alterations in "present programs and policies" if it is to effectively prosecute the long-term conflict with the Soviet Bloc. The world may be entering a new and uncertain phase of the East-West conflict, in which maximum flexibility in Western policies will be required if "time" is to be on our side.

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if extremely general terms our likely power position vis-a-vis the Soviet Bloc if present trends continue and if various major alternative developments do or do not come to pass. Moreover, by examining the relative impact of these alternatives, we can at least establish the significant factors which might alter present trends.

I. PROBABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH OF SOVIET BLOC AND THE WEST

2. The Soviet Bloc. Assuming a continuation of present policies and programs, the economic strength of the Soviet Bloc will probably continue to increase rapidly over the next 10-15 years. We believe that the rate of growth of the Soviet economy will almost certainly remain higher than the rate attained by any major Western state, and that total Soviet GNP might double by 15 years from now. However, the rapid rate of increase in GNP, which we estimate averaged 7-8% in 1948-52, is already leveling off and the average rate of growth toward the end of the period is unlikely to average more than 4-5%.

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3. Bloc economic capabilities to sustain a global war, already high, are likely to increase even more substantially than the overall strength of the Bloc economy: (a) the USSR, the Satellites and Communist China will probably continue to place more emphasis on this objective than on the civilian economy; (b) Bloc self-sufficiency will probably greatly increase over the period; and (c) ^{some of the} ~~various~~ existing vulnerabilities of the Soviet economy ^{may} ~~will~~ be largely overcome.

4. Several contingencies might affect these projections. A prolonged struggle for power or increased internal dissension in the Soviet Bloc might dissipate Soviet energies. A relaxation in the forced pace of Bloc industrialization and a shift to consumer goods production might reduce the rate of increase in Bloc capabilities to mount a major war. The difficulty of increasing the industrial labor force in the USSR, the probable lag in agricultural production, and difficulties in raising productivity in a totalitarian system may prove serious limiting factors.

5. The West. It is even more difficult to estimate the probable economic growth of the West over the next 10-15 years. The freer and less closely integrated Western economies,

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particularly those of the major US allies, are more vulnerable to economic fluctuations and trends in international trade than are those of the Bloc. However, assuming a continuation of present trends and no serious depressions, we estimate that the average rate of growth of the US economy will be on the order of 2-3% over the next 10-15 years, leading to an increase of roughly _____% over this period. The economic growth of the major US allies (i.e., the NATO powers) is far harder to estimate. Much will depend upon the ability of the Western Powers to establish a pattern of international trade which will foster increased productivity, reduce the reliance of other free world nations on US assistance, provide such countries as the UK, Germany and Japan with adequate free world markets, and in general permit a steady growth in free world economic strength. The US role will be of critical importance in this field. However, on moderately favorable assumptions, we would estimate the probable economic growth of the NATO powers as a whole at _____% over the next 15 years.

6. Even assuming such a growth in overall Western economic strength, we believe that the Western Powers will continue to face much greater difficulties than the Soviet Bloc in their ability to mobilize their resources for cold or hot war. The level of resources required to maintain their civilian economies

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will remain substantially greater, their ability (and desire) to impose sacrifices will be less, and the problems of devising common and equally effective policies among different and often divergent nations will remain difficult to overcome.

7. Therefore, although the overall economic strength of the Western Powers will remain (substantially) greater than that of the Soviet Bloc over the next 10-15 years, the gap between the two will probably be considerably narrowed. Except in the event of unforeseen political or economic changes in either the Soviet or Western blocs, the relative ability of the Soviet Bloc to mobilize its resources for both hot and cold war is also likely to remain greater than that of the West. Thus before the Soviet Bloc comes close to equalling total Western economic potential, it may reach the point where its economic capabilities for sustaining a prolonged global war will be comparable to those of the West.

8. (Although numerous factors could alter the above projections, we believe that so far as relative economic growth and capabilities are concerned, time would appear to be on the

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Soviet side. Not only is the Bloc likely to progressively close the gap in total economic resources but its ability to mobilize these resources is likely to remain superior and its vulnerability to unfavorable economic developments will continue to be less than that of the Western Powers. On the other hand: (a) the West will remain for a considerable period greatly superior to the Soviet Bloc in total economic resources and potential; (b) while the Soviet Bloc is unlikely to exceed the above rates of growth and mobilization capacity, it lies within the power of the West, by wise and forceful action, to markedly increase not only its own rate of economic growth but even more its ability to mobilize its resources; and (c) because of the revolution in modern means of warfare (outlined in Part II below), the relative overall economic growth and strength of the two world power blocs is unlikely to be the most important factor which determines whether time is on our side.]

II. PROBABLE OVERALL MILITARY CAPABILITIES OF THE SOVIET BLOC AND THE WEST

9. Given the rapid technological revolution in means of warfare, the overall technological and military equation looms as one of the most important factors in whether or not time is on our side. While the overall scientific assets of the West

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(number and quality of trained personnel, facilities, equipment, and financial support) are far greater than those of the Soviet Bloc, the USSR is expending great effort to reduce this disparity. Moreover, the Bloc will probably continue to devote a higher proportion of its scientific and technical assets to military purposes than the West. Therefore, we believe that insofar as overall scientific and technological capabilities are concerned, the Soviet Bloc is likely to narrow the gap between it and the West over the next 10-15 years.

10. Despite the difficulty of any firm estimate, we believe that throughout the next 10-15 years the West will continue to maintain a substantial edge over the Soviet Bloc overall scientific capabilities, in numbers and quality of atomic weapons, in means of delivery, and in air defense capabilities, but that the Soviet Bloc will gradually narrow the existing gap in most, if not all of these respects. We cannot estimate, of course, the likelihood of a technological breakthrough on either side.

11. Moreover, any assessment of relative scientific and military capabilities is complicated by the likelihood that at some time in the foreseeable future the world will have entered a period in which both of the great power blocs will have the

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capacity to cripple or even annihilate the other, though only at grave risk of equally crippling blows in return. For the first time, the heartlands of both the Soviet Bloc and Western Powers will be open to devastating assault. Except in event of an unforeseen technological breakthrough, we believe that neither side would be able to prevent powerful retaliation in kind.

12. Within the relatively near future, we assume that the US, if it has not already done so, will acquire a sufficient stockpile of atomic and thermo-nuclear and adequate means of delivery to enable it to destroy the industrial core of the USSR. On the other hand, at some point in the next several years the USSR also will probably acquire enough bombs, if these could be delivered on target, to cripple US war-making potential. Estimates of future Soviet stockpiles and the number of bombs required vary widely, but we believe that the USSR will possess a sufficient number of such weapons within the next (3-6) years. It seems increasingly clear that means of delivery rather than number of atomic weapons will be the chief limitation on Soviet capabilities, but we believe that over the next several years, the USSR will substantially improve its means of attack.

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13. Therefore, even assuming a substantial increase in US air defenses, it is likely that the USSR will probably eventually acquire the means of delivery with which, regardless of losses, to saturate these defenses and cripple the US. Unless some unforeseen new development in defensive weapons and techniques permits a much higher level of effective defense than now seems attainable, we believe that the present cycle of offensive superiority over the defensive is likely to continue, and that a sufficiently high proportion of attackers will probably get through.

14. As a result the immense strategic advantage of the US-- its practical invulnerability to crippling enemy attack which permitted a relatively leisurely post-D/day mobilization--is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. Intelligence cannot estimate the time in which the US will become vulnerable to a crippling attack on its war-making capacity, but it is probably within the next 10-15 years. Therefore, despite probable US retention of a sizable margin of technological superiority, superior atomic offensive capabilities, and a relatively lesser vulnerability to crippling attack than the Soviet Union, to the extent that the USSR narrows the gap in these respects and the industrial core of the US becomes increasingly vulnerable, time is probably on the Soviet side.

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15. Conventional military capabilities are so increasingly tied to as well as overshadowed by the atomic equation that it is difficult to make any valid estimate.

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III. PROBABLE TRENDS IN THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL STRENGTH
AND COHESION OF THE SOVIET BLOC AND THE WEST

16. Probable Trends in the Soviet Bloc. In contrast to economic scientific, and military factors, it is difficult to make even a tentative estimate of the extent to which political and social trends and developments will affect the relative power positions of the two great power blocs over so long a period as the next 10-15 years. At present we see no indications that the economic and military bases of Soviet power have been affected by Stalin's death. We believe, however, that there is an ever present possibility of a debilitating struggle for power. More-

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over, it is possible that over the next 10-15 years internal conflicts in the Soviet system, might cause a retraction and decay of Soviet power. Totalitarian systems, whatever their initial successes, have historically carried within them the seeds of their own decay. We cannot estimate, however, at what point or to what extent such a historical process would begin to have a material effect on the power position of the Soviet Bloc.

17. In any case we believe it unsafe to assume that the Bloc will not retain its cohesion and centralized direction over the next 10-15 years. While the policies of the post-Stalin regime, with its modest relaxation of tight Soviet controls, may permit periodic overt manifestations of discontent behind the Iron Curtain, over the long run such more flexible policies may also tend to lengthen the Kremlin's lease on power. The European Satellites will probably remain under control of the Kremlin, and the Chinese Communists will probably continue to work in close accord with the USSR. Nevertheless the possibility exists that conflicts of aim and interest between Peiping and Moscow may cause Communist China to attempt to play an increasingly independent role. Should this potential weakness, which may be exploitable

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by the West, develop into a rift between the two chief Communist states, it would be a major blow to Soviet power.

18. Trends in the Political and Social Strength and Cohesion of the West. Because of the much greater diversity of the looser Western coalition and the much greater variety of forces at play, it is even more difficult to project probable trends in Western strength and cohesion as they affect the global balance of power. However, at no time in the foreseeable future are the Western Powers likely to attain (or even desire to attain) the centralized control, unity of action, and ability to mobilize their resources that characterizes the Bloc. In general the Western Powers will probably continue to be more vulnerable to internal conflicts, economic fluctuations, and divisive influences than the monolithic Soviet Bloc. Much will depend on international economic developments, on future Soviet policy, on the future position of major nations like Germany, Japan, and India and above all on the role played by the acknowledged leader of the Western coalition, the US itself.

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19. As the only single aggregation of resources outside the US itself comparable to the Soviet Bloc, Western Europe plays a pivotal role in the world power balance. Its continued weakness is a major vulnerability of the Western Powers, while its wartime acquisition would be a tremendous increment to the power of the Soviet Bloc. If the NATO powers can succeed in markedly improving their defensive posture, if Franco-German differences can be resolved and a rearmed Germany brought fully into the NATO coalition, if European economic growth is sufficient both to support an adequate rearmament effort and to permit some increase in standards of living, and if present and potential intra-European and US-European differences can be amicably resolved, then the balance of power will be altered greatly in favor of the West.

20. On the other hand, we see many obstacles to the achievement of this objective. We believe that a primary concern of the Kremlin over the coming period will be to frustrate the development of a viable and defensible Western Europe. In this effort the Kremlin will undoubtedly concentrate on the key to the

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development could lead to serious divergencies between the US and various of its European partners, with a consequent divisive impact on the cohesion of the Western bloc.

21. In addition, we believe that a Kremlin shift to a more moderate policy will present a real challenge to the further growth in strength and cohesion of the Western Powers. To date the US has succeeded in creating and partially rearming an anti-Soviet coalition under the impetus of an acute Soviet threat. Should this threat appear to diminish, we believe that it would be difficult to maintain the support of many of our allies for continued rearmament, greater unity, and aggressive anti-Communist policies. The likelihood of divisions among the Western Powers, especially if encouraged by skillful Kremlin policies, would markedly increase. Should this situation actually develop, it might seriously affect the free world power position vis-a-vis the USSR. It might lead, over the longer run, to some of our allies adopting more neutral positions, or even to the creation of a European "Third Force".

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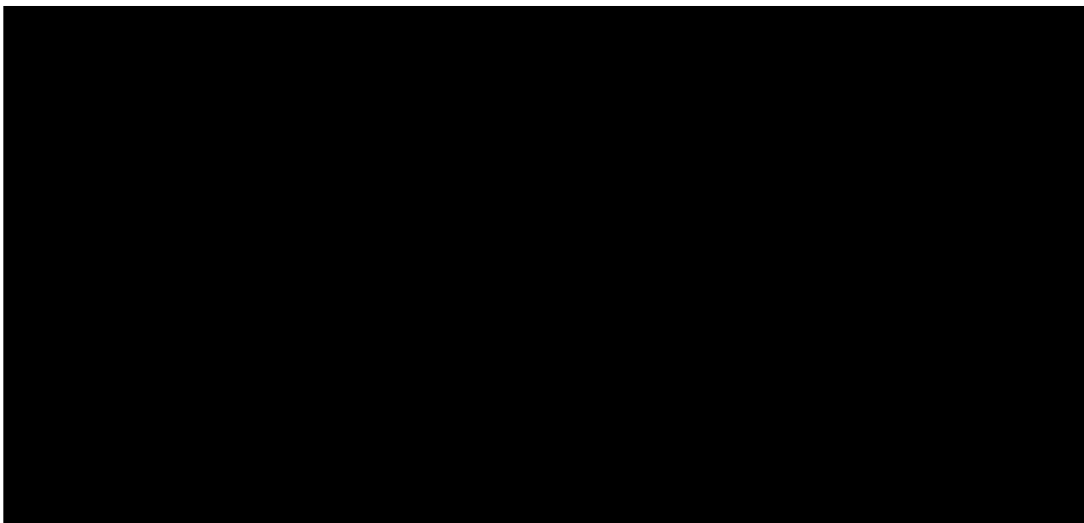
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23. Probable Trends in the Strength and Alignment of "Gray" Areas. A major vulnerability of the West is represented by the extreme political and social instability of the underdeveloped areas of the Middle East, Far East, and increasingly in Africa, where profound social changes are in progress, entailing in many areas disorder and consequent vulnerability to Communist influences. The consequent danger to the Western position is acute in some areas of Southeast Asia and the Middle East. For example, a Viet Minh conquest of Indochina, which is possible, would probably result in eventual loss of most of mainland Southeast Asia and in worsened prospects for stability in the Indian sub-continent. A Communist takeover in Iran, which is also possible,

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would jeopardize the already unstable Western position in the Middle East. The anti-Western overtones of the political and social revolution in the Middle and Far East and Africa create another serious obstacle to the mobilization of their resources on the side of the West.

24. On the other hand, Western control or influence is still paramount in the undeveloped areas, and the US and its allies have many assets in their search for the allegiance of the new and emergent Asian and African states. Over the next 10-15 years the US and its allies may be able to establish new relationships of mutual confidence with the undeveloped countries; much will depend on the leadership exerted by the US. In any case while the South and Southeast Asian states in particular will over the long run become increasingly important elements in the world balance of power, we do not believe that gains or losses in these areas will basically alter the world power balance in the next 10-15 years.

IV. IS TIME ON OUR SIDE?

25. Despite the difficulty of any firm estimate, we believe that to the extent that the Soviet Bloc continues over the next 10-15 years to narrow the existing economic, technological, and

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atomic gap between its own and Western capabilities time will be on the Soviet side. Despite the probable retention in these respects of some Western margin of superiority, this gap may be of decreasing significance, because: (a) the Soviet Bloc will probably retain a superior ability to mobilize its resources; and (b) within the foreseeable future the USSR will probably be capable of a crippling attack on the US economy, notwithstanding the continued existence of a greater US capability to devastate the USSR.

26. We cannot estimate whether ⁱⁿ terms of the probable relative political and social strength and cohesion of the Soviet Bloc and the Western Powers time is on our side. We believe that the possibilities of internal decay or collapse of the totalitarian Bloc system are far greater than those of the West, and that given the relative flexibility and vitality of free world as opposed to Communist institutions, time is probably on the side of the West. However, it is unsafe to assume that such a development will take place within any given period, such as the next 10-15 years. Until the process of internal disintegration sets in, moreover, the totalitarian nature of the Soviet system and the Kremlin's pervasive control or influence over its Bloc partners will continue to

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provide it with many advantages in a power struggle with the looser coalition led by the US.

27. Should Communist China develop Titoist tendencies, it would be a major blow to the Soviet power position. Similarly the successful long term alignment of a powerful Germany and Japan with the NATO powers would be a major gain for the West. In particular, the recreation of a strong and viable Western Europe, including Germany, would substantially decrease Western vulnerability and alter the present power relationship between the Soviet and Western blocs. On the other hand, continued Western difficulties in establishing a new relationship with the undeveloped states of Asia and Africa and the possible loss of key areas to Communist control make the Western position seriously vulnerable in these areas.

29. There is also danger that a shift in Soviet tactics, without any change in basic Soviet objectives, might permit the Bloc to use time more effectively to its advantage at the expense of the US and its allies. If the Kremlin calls a halt to the period of "active" cold war and embarks on a period of attempted co-existence (though at the same time continuing its forced pace

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of industrialization and armament) the West may be lulled by a shift in Soviet external policy to relax its guard. Thus the West might at some future date be faced with the prospect that the USSR had greatly improved its own relative power position, and was prepared to renew the East-West conflict with perhaps a decisive advantage over the West.

30. Therefore we tentatively estimate that if present trends continue, and in the absence of (a) a breakdown in the Soviet control system; (b) a presently unforeseen growth in Western strength and cohesion; or (c) achievement by either side of a technological breakthrough, time is more on the Soviet side. We do not believe, however, that this trend is inevitable nor that even under these circumstances the West has necessarily lost out. Even if over the next 10-15 years the Bloc greatly narrows the gap between Soviet and Western power, it will almost certainly be unable to achieve a decisive increase in its strength. In addition, the Bloc is already close to the maximum rate of increase in its power potential, while the US and its allies still have numerous opportunities for greatly increasing their cohesion and strength. Alteration of the above trend in power relationships almost certainly lies within the grasp of the West.

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